Learner Preferences toward Native-speaker English in Japanese EFL Education

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a survey study exploring various preferences of Japanese students in pursuing English study. This research was conducted to explore differences in preferences between learners who may be considered to be aware of the nature of English as used in the world and learners who lack such awareness. The research suggests there are no profound differences in such motivations between learners deemed "aware" of international English and learners who are not. The study suggests that educators balance curricular needs with learner preferences, and classroom implications are discussed to help achieve this balance.

Introduction

In the push to promote the values of English as an international language (EIL) in the language classroom, much has been made in the relevant literature regarding the importance that language teachers should place or desire to place on the non-native speaking (NNS) aspects of English communication in the world. Indeed, as the number of non-native users of English increases, scholars interested in EIL point to a growing number of educators that wish to focus on a sort of English education that is geared toward NNS English varieties and proficiency among non-native speakers (McKay, 2003). Conversely, very little research has been conducted to examine the perspectives and motivations of language learners in NNS contexts. Furthermore, the current research on the subject has largely been used to express a need to correct such perceptions, should they differ from EIL principles, and to bring them in line with educators' goals (Miyazato, 2009), rather than adjust EFL curricula to suit and accommodate such motivations.

The study presented in this paper attempts to place a greater focus on learner perspectives regarding awareness of English and goals for study. Exploring why learners choose to study English may provide some insight into the possible differences in worldviews between educators and learners regarding EIL, and help to determine the appropriateness (or lack thereof) of elements of EIL in the general realm of EFL education. Moreover, it may prove useful to examine whether or not a greater appreciation of the varied uses for English in the NNS realm has any

influence on the goals that learners have for attaining language proficiency.

This paper contrasts the approach that EIL proponents adopt regarding learner preferences with the results of a survey study conducted with English language learners in Japan. This research sought to explore the nature and relationship of several factors, including the intrinsic desire to learn English, an awareness of English as it is used in the world, and the personal motivations for studying English. The findings from this study seem to indicate that, at least in Japanese EFL education, a greater awareness among learners of the scope of NNS English has very little, if any, relationship to the goals of learners. Language learners, regardless of EIL awareness appear to exhibit a greater interest in studying the language for purposes that relate to communication with native speakers or access to NS culture.

The survey study, involving senior high school and university students in Japan, appears to suggest that a significant portion of learners are, on the whole, less interested in pursuing goals that can be obtained through studying English as an international language than pursuing goals that require contact with the NS realm. These preferences, according to the results of this study, seem to remain consistent, regardless of whether or not those learners are aware of the breadth and depth of English usage possible with and among non-native speakers.

Background

Kachru (1992), in defining World Englishes (WE) for academic discourse, elaborated on a model that divides the world into three different areas according to what degree of English is used. The Inner Circle contains countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where English is the official or essential first or native language. Other countries are categorized as belonging to the Outer Circle (areas which possess a stable variety of English but in which English is not the first or native language) or the Expanding Circle (areas where English is still developing or not developing at all). With some exceptions, non-native speakers can be considered to exist largely in the Outer and Expanding Circles, whereas the label of "native-speaker" is given primarily, if not exclusively, to those in the Inner Circle.

As varieties of English develop in Outer and Expanding Circle countries, partially or completely independent of Inner Circle influence, Western-centric approaches to language teaching and learning have been challenged in the current literature. According to Brown (2011), traditional paradigms in EFL education tend to focus on Inner Circle varieties of English as dominant models for language learning, while curriculum development oriented towards EIL assumes that "local cultures of teaching and learning should be included, or even dominant." Such local cultures, when compared to top-down traditional EFL structures, would differ in how phonology, grammar, and pragmatics are taught, but also in what topics of content are given

greater focus. Brown advocates that EFL curricula incorporate NNS varieties of English in order to raise awareness among language learners that English does not wholly belong to Inner Circle cultures.

Questions regarding the ownership of English, particularly as English usage in the Outer and Expanding Circles continues to eclipse English usage in the Inner Circle, have long been debated in EFL education. As English developed into a lingua franca, Pennycook (1994) took note of the concurrent spread of mass media from Western countries into NNS countries, which in turn were influenced by the perceived power of English-speaking cultures and the connection between fluency in the English language and the resulting, predicted sense of empowerment for those learners who achieve it. Many scholars sympathetic to the idea of a struggle in NNS contexts against the imposition of NS culture in the language classroom have sought a philosophy in EFL education that promotes NNS culture and English usage primarily and even exclusively among non-native speakers.

Holliday (2005), for example, fashions a comparison between the "native-speakerist" teacher, whose views of the world are narrow and parochial, and the ideal teacher whom he sees is more in tune with the needs of her students as she better understands and takes advantage of the conditions unique to the local context of her classroom. The EIL narrative regarding the importance of local concerns over Western-centric imperatives has become a key element in the discussion regarding the direction of EFL education in NNS contexts, particularly as non-Western countries continue to gain influence within the international community. Given this sort of worldview in which global influence shifts away from Western countries, EIL has become an intuitively attractive concept for a growing number of English teachers in NNS contexts, given the growing number of non-native speakers around the world relative to the smaller number of native speakers, and the increasing breadth of uses for English that may not require or involve communication with native speakers or contact with NS culture. Matsuda (2003a), a fervent proponent of EIL ideology in Japanese EFL education, strongly suggests that those learners who perceive English as a language within the purview of its native speakers should adopt views about their language use that are more in line with the greater reality of English usage within the larger realm of non-native speakers.

Related to this narrative, scholars in NNS contexts have also expressed a preference for EIL-related aspects in their own classrooms. McKay's (2003) survey research of Chilean teachers of English, for example, documented a preference among NNS teachers to adopt a greater classroom focus on cultural content in their own country and in other NNS countries around the world than content focusing on culture in NS countries. There is an implication in such research that indicates a resistance among teachers to NS English varieties, which has been extended to

include resistance to NS influence in the TESOL profession regarding issues of employment practices, perceived as favoring NS teachers in NNS contexts, and perceptions of linguistic imperialism imposed on NNS cultures. Holliday's (2005) research in interviewing teachers in NNS contexts thoroughly highlights the supposed injustices that many non-native teachers perceive in EFL education, with the assumption that English instruction in such contexts tends to suppress local culture in favor of more parochial views from NS countries. Such inequities, Holliday argues, are perpetuated by resistance in professional ELT circles against the proliferation of EIL ideology, and a perceived desire by NS teachers with narrow, parochial views, under Holliday's (2006) definition of "native-speakerism", to promote cultural stereotyping and "othering" of language learners at the expense of NNS cultures.

Various remedies to correct the language classroom's perceived imbalance between NS and NNS cultures have been recommended in recent literature, and their implications are serious enough to warrant greater scrutiny of the EIL paradigm, however appealing it may be. Miyazato (2009), for example, has called for drastically reducing the influence of native speakers in the classroom by modifying the hiring practices of Japanese high schools to include more NNS teachers from around the world. This call is repeated in an article emphasizing a need for more NNS English varieties in Japanese EFL classrooms, in the hopes that Japanese learners of English will challenge perceived misconceptions about English and Western-centric perspectives (Miyagi, Sato and Crump, 2009). Such remedies, while ambitious, must be placed in the context of these scholars' preferences toward NNS English, particularly considering any disparate worldviews that language learners may have.

While these proposals seek to achieve political ends, this paper takes the position that they do not appear to take sufficient consideration of whether learners are amenable to such shifts, given the possible motivations they bring to the classroom. In this respect, though the views of language teachers appear well-established to EIL proponents, evidence of similar preferences among learners has been limited, and such evidence that appears to favor NS culture or influence is largely dismissed in the same literature. Miyazato (2009) proposes reducing the influence of NS teachers, paradoxically, on the basis of interviews conducted with students who express a preference for NS English. Matsuda (2003b), in identifying differences in perspectives between EIL scholars and language learners, advocates a more dismissive perspective of learner motivations, judging learners within the current status quo as oppressed by EFL institutions that favor native speakers and their culture. As Matsuda asserts, only a greater awareness of English and its status in NNS countries will persuade NNS learners, seen in the EIL worldview as largely oppressed by language education which has been influenced, if not co-opted, by native-speakerism, to break with a colonialistic view of the world that "devalue[s] their own status in

international communication" (p. 722). In this sense, the promotion of EIL above the regard of learner perceptions appears to adopt a top-down imperative to combat NS influence rather than create an EFL learning environment compatible with local contexts.

This paper does not take the position that value judgments of one's ability to emulate L2 nativeness should be perpetuated, nor should education unjustly impose a NS-centric agenda onto NNS contexts. Indeed, one of the central goals of language education is to foster intercultural communication so that understanding across cultures can be achieved. Rather, this researcher asserts that, even if awareness of EIL is attained, it remains to be seen whether students would continue to pursue NNS-related goals, if not abandon NS-related goals completely. It is not clear, by intuition or through the relevant research, whether language learners would reconsider their pursuit of NS-related goals simply because they are more "aware" of the nature and scope of English as an international language.

To explore this narrative, this researcher conducted a study that sought to more concretely explore the connection between learner awareness and learner preference and as best as possible, determine the nature of learner motivations when influenced by a greater awareness of the full scope of English usage in the world. Past literature has already highlighted the degree to which language learners in Japan are aware (or in Japan's case, generally unaware) of English as a lingua franca outside of NS countries (Honna and Takeshita, 1998). However, this study aimed to determine how learner motivations would differ between learners who are more fully aware of English usage around the world and learners who are less aware.

Methodology

The project attempted to answer or provide insight for the following research questions:

- RQ1 - How informed are English language learners of the status and nature of English as it is used in the world?
- RQ2 - Among more informed English language learners, what are their motivations for pursuing English study?

RQ1 seeks to explore the validity of the premise that language learners are generally unaware of how English is used as a lingua franca, not exclusively used for communication with or among native speakers of English. One of the study's aims was to determine if language learners in Japan were, in fact, largely unaware of the spread of English around the world, as Honna and Takeshita suggest.

RQ2 attempted to explore motivations among those language learners who are, in fact, aware of the status of English in the NNS world. Implied in the narrative that recommends awareness-raising is an expectation in the perceived, almost certain shift in learner attitudes and

consequently, learner motivations for acquiring English fluency. Learners would, under this narrative, shift their motivations away from acquiring fluency for NS target domains (i.e. communicating/making friends with native speakers, traveling abroad to native-English-speaking countries) and toward acquiring fluency for NNS domains (i.e. teaching English to non-native speakers, using English for jobs in NNS countries).

To explore these suppositions, a survey was created for Japanese learners of English to examine their awareness of where and to what degree English is used, their personal motivations for studying English, and whether they are interested in pursuing English study at all.

The survey for this project posed five questions to learners:

1) What type of student are you? (i.e. senior high school, university)

2) How long have you been studying English? (answers given in years and months)

3) If English was not a required subject, what language would you prefer to study?

4) In what countries is English used on a regular basis?

5) If you were a fluent speaker of English, how would you want to use English?

The study posed question 3 as a means to elicit whether language learners are genuinely interested in studying English, as opposed to taking English classes mainly to meet educational requirements. Respondents were given two choices (“English” or “Another language”) and expected to choose one. Narrowing the study to primarily examine interested learners of English was considered by this researcher as necessary when exploring the desires of learners in acquiring fluency in English.

Intuitively, those respondents who are aware of the status of English in the world are expected to identify a greater number of countries beyond the typically identifiable IC countries as contexts where English is or can be regularly used. In question 4, respondents were given a list of thirty countries (arranged in Japanese kana order, akin to alphabetical order in English) from which to choose. Countries were selected to provide as accurate a linguistic and geographical representation of the English-speaking world as possible. Within the list, four Inner Circle

Table 1 – Awareness model for question 4	
Affirmative responses (26)	Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, Ghana, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Turkey
Distracters (4)	Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, United States

countries, a mix of sixteen Outer and Expanding Circle countries (explicitly listed by Kachru, 1992), and ten other NNS countries were listed.

In the contemporary literature, measurements for awareness of EIL are not well-defined; Matsuda's (2003a) study, for example, touched on the subject of awareness but only through student interviews. The research in this paper takes a quantitative approach, proposing one possible definition of awareness as acknowledgement that English is used throughout the world, and not merely in NS countries such as the United States or Canada. Under this definition, a learner that recognizes English can be spoken in a NNS country is said to be more "aware" than a learner who views English as a language used only in NS countries.

Question 5 listed ten possible goals for studying English, adapted in part from Benson's (1991) survey study also examining motivations of Japanese learners of English. In that study, Benson labeled different motivations for studying English as either "instrumental" (as having practical purposes such as passing university exams) or "integrative" (which may imply a learner's internal desire to attain multilingualism or multiculturalism). That study noted that learners were more interested in pursuing English for integrative reasons than for instrumental ones. For the purposes of this study, a number of learner goals from that study were supplemented with other motivations in consultation with other English teachers within this researcher's school and divided into two groups; five are considered common NS domains while the other five are common NNS domains, listed from shortest-worded goal to longest (see Table 1). The final list was created in the hopes of presenting, as best as possible, a wide range of possible motivations that teachers in this discussion felt were likely goals for their students. Respondents had to select their preference for each goal on a 5-point Likert scale, 1 meaning little or no preference, and 5 meaning a strong preference. A space was provided for respondents to specify another motivation not listed in

Table 2 – Survey goals for question 5

Native-speaking domains	Non-native-speaking domains
● work in native-English-speaking countries ● study in native-English-speaking countries ● travel to native-English-speaking countries for vacation ● communicate/make friends with native-English speakers ● enjoy English-speaking entertainment (movies, television, books)	● teach English ● volunteer with an NGO ● use English for work in Japan ● get a good TOEIC/Eiken score ● translate Japanese into English

question 5.

The survey was written in English and translated into Japanese with the assistance of a native-Japanese speaker. It was then piloted to a test group of sixteen students and edited in response to feedback by the teacher of the test group and other teachers who offered their advice before mass distribution of the survey. Responding to teacher feedback in the pilot phase, the list of countries was modified to include a more appropriate geographical balance while maintaining, for the most part, the relative proportion between NS and NNS countries.

Respondents

Japan, considered an Expanding Circle country, is an ideal NNS context for this research due to its perceived cultural distance from English-speaking countries, as well as a developing English variety distinct from NS varieties. In Japan, access to English-speaking popular culture is abundant in movies, television, and music. English education in Japan is compulsory for junior and senior high school students, and is mandatory at virtually all universities. The Japanese government actively recruits native-English speakers to teach or assist in teaching English at junior and senior high schools through the JET Program, ensuring that language learners are exposed to NS varieties of English throughout their secondary education. Proficiency in English is seen as a sign of status in Japanese society, and those Japanese seen as communicative in English are considered to be afforded greater job opportunities and upward mobility. Standardized tests such as Eiken and TOEIC provide certification for such proficiency. These factors create a large demand for additional English instruction in language schools and cram schools, which also provide learners with access to NS teachers.

This researcher contacted various senior high school and university teachers in the greater Tokyo area, and asked them to distribute surveys to their students in their English classes and return them by hand or by postal mail. Teachers were advised to distribute the survey in classes where the student body predominantly consisted of Japanese-speaking, developing English learners; "returnee" classes with predominantly bilingual students or English-monolingual students, for example, were avoided altogether. Teachers were instructed to provide 5-10 minutes of silent time in their classes for their students to complete the survey without consultation with classmates or help from the teacher. Those teachers, this researcher included, returned a total of 963 surveys completed by students between October and November 2011.

Results

Survey data was entered by hand and analyzed in Microsoft Excel for the following information:

- interest in studying English (or in studying other languages)
- awareness of English usage (awareness model, see Table 2)
- self-reported length of time studying English (indicated by number of months)
- level of interest in pursuing English for NS target domains (NS interest, see Table 4)
- level of interest in pursuing English for NNS target domains (NNS interest, see Table 4)

Table 3 – Learner preferences for language study (n = 963)	
Interested in English	633 (66%)
Interested in another language (not interested in English)	284 (29%)
Interested in both	5 (< 1%)
Interested in neither	41 (4%)

Table 4 – Averages of Likert scores for learner motivations	
Interest area	Interested learners only (n = 633)
Translate Japanese	2.832
Teach English	2.856
Volunteer with NGO	2.866
Work abroad	3.532
Work in Japan	3.704
Study abroad	3.912
TOEIC/Eiken	4.011
Make friends	4.171
Entertainment	4.316
Travel abroad	4.453
Shaded areas indicate native-speaking domains	

Table 5 – Level of awareness, interested learners only (n = 633)	
x = 0%	151 (24%)
0% < x <= 10%	204 (32%)
10% < x <= 20%	183 (29%)
20% < x <=30%	33 (5%)
30% < x <= 40%	32 (5%)
40% < x <= 50%	12 (2%)
50% < x <= 60%	4 (< 1%)
60% < x <= 70%	7 (1%)
70% < x <= 80%	0 (0%)
80% < x <= 90%	0 (0%)
90% < x <= 100%	7 (1%)

As shown in Table 3, a majority of survey respondents (66%) indicated a genuine interest in studying English, while 30% would prefer to study another language other than English if given the choice. 38 respondents (4%) selected neither choice, and 4 selected both choices. For the purposes of this paper, only those learners interested in studying English were isolated for analysis (those who had selected both choices were not included).

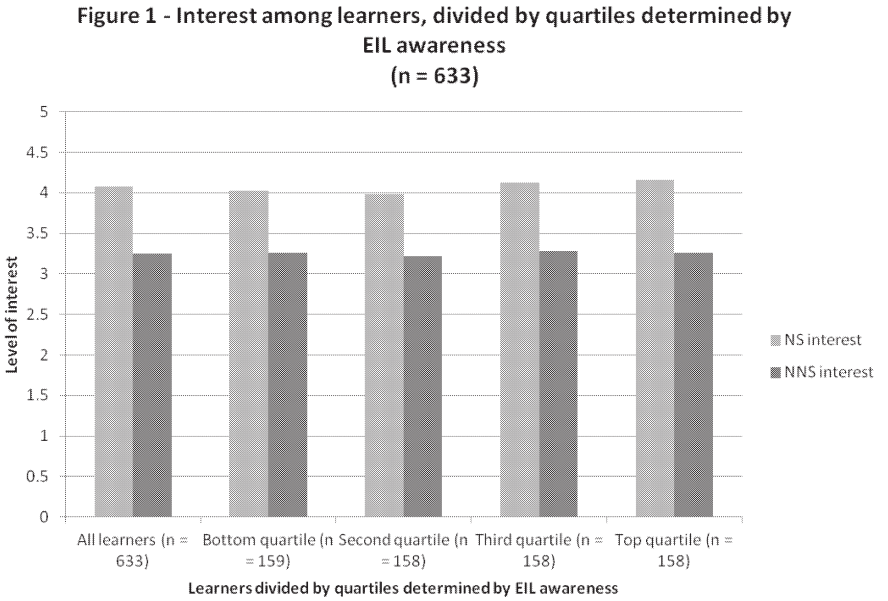
The level of interest for each preference among these learners was determined by taking the average of reported Likert scores for each goal. According to Table 4, the level of interest in the pursuit of goals regarding NS domains generally averaged higher than that of goals regarding NNS domains. Three of the five NS-related goals ranked the highest in terms of learner interest. Only interest in obtaining higher test scores and English proficiency for work in Japan ranked higher than any NS-related goal.

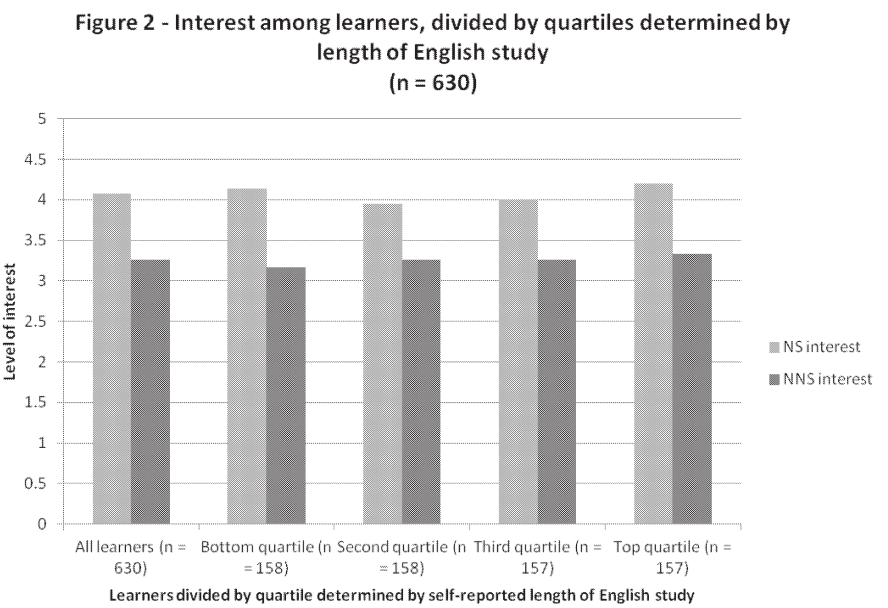
The study also collected free-response rationales for studying English, but the number of free-response answers (25) was insignificant for quantitative analysis. Written responses (with approximate translations) included the following:

- ホテルで働く work at a hotel
- 歌手になる become a singer
- 西洋のお姉さん達とお話したい。I want to talk with women from the West.
- 国際的女優になる become an international actress
- 外国版のゲームをする play foreign video games
- 外国の女性と結婚する marry a foreign woman
- いい大学に入る enter a good university
- 海外に友達をつくる make friends from abroad
- 英語を話す人々に日本語を教えたい。I want to teach Japanese to English-speaking people.

Meeting or marrying women from other countries was mentioned in some form or another by four respondents, making it the most popular free-response answer along with “nothing” or “nothing special,” each of which was written by two different respondents.

Awareness was calculated as a percentage of the 26 NNS countries in the survey that learners acknowledged as accommodating English usage. As Table 5 indicates, 151 respondents, or 24% of interested English students, indicated no awareness that any of the NNS countries in the survey used English, and were thus given an awareness score of 0%. Conversely, only 95 respondents, or 15%, could identify more than 6 NNS countries that used English, for an awareness score of greater than 20%. Given that Kachru’s (1992) World Englishes model explicitly listed fifteen of these countries as Outer or Expanding Circle countries, this researcher can only





conclude that learners in this study are generally unaware of English usage outside of NS countries.

Ideally, survey respondents would have been divided between those who lack awareness of worldwide English usage and those who possess such awareness. However, a very small number of interested English students (18, or 3%) had scored greater than 50% on the awareness model. For analysis, survey respondents who indicated an interest in studying English were divided into

four quartiles from lowest awareness scores to highest. According to Figure 1, when considering the average levels of NS and NNS interest (determined as the average of averages of Likert scores for each respective set of domains), learners are consistently more interested in pursuing NS-related goals than in pursuing NNS-related goals. The data, therefore, possesses some indications that, even if learners are more aware of English usage throughout the world, it is not necessarily the case that they would be more interested in studying English for purposes related to interaction in or with NNS cultures than they would be for purposes related to interaction in or with NS cultures.

The survey responses were further analyzed to measure the changes in the levels of interest against the length of time studying English (among interested English learners, three respondents left question 2 blank, and were not included in this analysis). As Figure 2 shows, NS interest remained consistently higher than NNS interest in each of the four quartiles, as determined by self-reported length of time studying English. NNS interest does seem to be slightly greater in respondents that have reported a longer experience in studying English, giving some indication that length of time, rather than EIL awareness, may have a stronger influence on learner preferences.

Limitations

This study was confined only to surveying Japanese-speaking English learners in Japan, and any conclusions drawn from this study can only be applied to Japanese EFL contexts. It is also necessary to emphasize that the sample obtained for this study was one of convenience, relying on contacts within this researcher's professional network. Further replication of this study in Japan, and then in other NNS contexts, is recommended to corroborate the results in this paper. Should future research yield similar findings, educators may need to consider more strongly how learner preferences can be reconciled with the goals of perpetuating EIL in the classroom.

Longitudinal study of learners is also recommended to study the effects of time and greater EIL awareness on possible shifts in preferences. This study can only provide a static analysis comparing learners with different histories and worldviews, rather than evidence of a conclusive correlation between preferences and awareness.

It is important to consider that, like all other responses in this survey, the respondent's time spent studying English is self-reported. One respondent, for example, answered the question with a length of time that suggested that the respondent had been studying English since birth, while another respondent (a university student according to the response to question 1) reported studying English for only six months. Because length of study was not a principal focus of this study, more thorough research is necessary to gauge learner interest in both NS and NNS

domains with respect to the time spent studying English to corroborate or dispute these findings.

Discussion

Analysis of the survey data did not indicate any significant differences in motivations for language study between more-aware students and less-aware students. Instead, the results appear to suggest a consistent preference among learners to study English for objectives that call for usage in or access to NS domains, regardless of such learners' awareness of English's status as a lingua franca.

This study does confirm Matsuda's (2003b) findings that learners, at least in Japanese EFL education, tend to have only a surface understanding of EIL, if any understanding at all. However, the study also seems to indicate that learners who do exhibit some awareness of EIL largely share the same motivations as learners who lack such awareness. In doing so, the survey results appear to place in some doubt certain suppositions regarding EIL, however intuitive and well-intentioned, that awareness-raising of the basic ideas regarding English as a lingua franca would cause a significant or even noticeable shift in attitudes among students in the language classroom. Put more directly, language learners appear to pursue English as they would most other foreign languages, with a strong desire to achieve fluency for communication with native speakers or interaction with NS culture. This desire, the research indicates, also seems to outweigh any desire to pursue opportunities that do not involve native speakers. Most importantly, whether or not learners are aware of the range of English usage throughout the world does not appear to have a significant effect on such desires.

Of course, it is important for scholars in this discussion to acknowledge that English as an international language is, in fact, an accepted reality that cannot be ignored among language educators. In addressing the needs and desires of language learners, however, scholars may need to entertain the possibility that acknowledgement of EIL and, if not readily acknowledged by students, its direct application in the classroom may not prove important to language learning or even relevant to language learners. As the study indicates, EIL, as a concept in language education, remains a minor niche in the face of the larger appeal of English-speaking culture for a potentially large portion of students interested in acquiring English fluency (native-like and otherwise).

The historical nature of language education in Japan does arguably play a role in influencing the results of the survey. NS teachers (and native speakers in general) hold a significant cultural and institutional influence over learners relative to that in other countries, at the likely expense of non-native speakers. Japanese learners of English tend to view NS culture as appealing within and without the context of language education, in large part because of constant exposure to NS

culture. As a result, it does appear that EIL proponents have a great deal of work in educating language learners in NNS contexts such as Japan that English usage is not exclusively confined to the NS world.

The implications of such institutional circumstances need to be properly addressed. It should dismay all educators that more than half of the respondents isolated for quantitative analysis exhibited little or no awareness of EIL. In this sense, Miyazato (2009) has a valid point that NNS teachers have negative attitudes about their own English ability when learners unaware of the possibility that non-native-speakers can achieve fluency favor less interaction with other non-native-speakers. As a matter of shaping attitudes about intercultural communication, the proliferation of EIL principles in the language classroom may do well to prevent fostering parochial, cultural stereotypes among learners. Immediately relevant to the most important goals of language educators, however, is the acknowledgement that such proliferation seems to have an insignificant bearing on learner interest, and may even demotivate language learners when the overt goals of educators come into direct conflict with the goals of their students.

That the sample for this study was obtained out of convenience, and that the results lack a strong connection between awareness of EIL principles and learner motivations, mean that the findings cannot easily be applied to all Japanese learners of English, let alone learners in other NNS contexts. More research is required in further addressing the research questions outlined above, but an affirmative and meaningful connection between a greater awareness of the status of English in the world and a profound shift in learner attitudes in language study toward NNS usage of English needs to be presented in the literature to challenge the findings and implications proposed by this research.

Scholars must also take care to avoid perpetuating the other extreme in this discussion, that learner preferences are the only overriding narrative that should determine the direction of EFL education. In responding to a narrative that only focuses on learner preferences, it may be easy, after all, to point out that constant and abundant exposure to native speakers and their culture can place into question whether such preferences are well-grounded. This paper only contends that such circumstances do not represent sufficient basis to summarily dismiss the goals of learners; regardless of historical or institutional causes, curricular needs must ultimately be balanced against such learner preferences, especially if the two are not compatible with each other.

Classroom implications

This study aims to provide guidance to educators to balance teacher preferences for their EFL curricula with learner goals for attaining English proficiency. Regardless of how English has

developed in the world, language educators today should acknowledge that English-speaking culture, if not fluency in the standard varieties that accompany it, has already taken root in non-Western societies (Sybing, 2011), as should be evidenced by the interest learners in this study demonstrate toward NS-related goals. In certain NNS countries where the mass media favors Western culture, English language learners there seem likely to aspire to native-like fluency and pronunciation because of interest in NS culture. The main concern is how EFL education reflects or ignores this circumstance. There is, of course, a valid concern in EIL circles about learners' aspirations toward native-like fluency and pronunciation, two qualities that are much admired but are far more difficult to acquire than knowledge of vocabulary and grammar structures, or insight of cultural content. Absent considerable time and effort far exceeding that which are typically afforded or available to classroom study, learners are likely to encounter frustration and become demotivated when high expectations are not met.

Given these considerations, EFL educators need to seek a solution that negotiates the pitfalls that accompany NS varieties of English while still addressing the aspirations that learners bring to the classroom. In pursuing an extreme that emphasizes NNS English varieties and marginalizes the importance and influence of NS English varieties, there is a danger that a number of key motivations that bring learners to pursue language study will be ignored simply for the sake of achieving political ends.

The power of such aspirations was highlighted in another study that surveyed a group of Japanese university students about their perceptions of L2 nativeness (Omi and Fukada, 2010). In that study, learners believed that it may not be necessary for non-native speakers in the abstract to have native-like pronunciation or fluency. On the other hand, when asked about their own goals in studying English, the same learners expressed a desire to attain native qualities for themselves. As Matsuda (2003b) did, the researchers of that study attributed such a disconnect to a lack of awareness of NNS English varieties, but the difference between perceptions and goals, nonetheless, demonstrates the influence of NS English on student motivation.

If nothing else, the role of NS culture needs to be viewed in EFL education, not as a potential source for fostering stereotypes or unfair judgments, but as a tool for language educators to raise learner interest and intrinsic motivation (Cheung, 2001). In considering the place of NS culture in EFL curricula and lesson planning, educators need to make a conscientious effort to balance their own personal motivations for promoting remedies for perceived inequalities in EFL education with the aspirations of language learners, some of whom possess goals that may come into conflict with a more politically-correct view of English and its usage throughout the world.

Conclusion

Yuen (2011), in arguing for a more politically-correct representation of non-English cultures in EFL textbooks, says that, "since English is used as an international language, the cultural content of ELT materials should not be limited to native English-speaking cultures and that when teaching English is viewed as teaching an international language, the culture should become the world itself" (p. 458). The underlying premise here stereotypes, through implication, all English language learners as desiring to use English as a lingua franca, whereas the research presented in this paper challenges the assumptions of EIL proponents that a sizable number of non-native speakers aim to acquire English fluency for communication with other non-native speakers or for use in NNS domains. Even the idea that English as an international language is an accepted norm in language education should be more vigorously scrutinized given the disparate motivations that learners may have, which may differ from the goals that are advanced by promoting EIL.

Other researchers are encouraged to corroborate or challenge the findings of this research in Japan and in other NNS contexts. The results of this study can only put into question whether the need for promoting EIL principles in the language classroom is so urgent given the preferences among learners for acquiring English to achieve goals that are best facilitated by a greater focus on NS varieties of English. That English is spoken around the world among a vast number of speakers that outnumber their counterparts in NS countries or for purposes that do not involve NS interaction are realities that cannot be refuted, but whether that is of significant and overriding relevance to language learners is a question that needs to be posed in the academic discourse regarding issues of language ownership, cultural perspectives and, most relevant to educators, curriculum design. While not conclusive by any means, that the study's findings do not support the notion connecting learner awareness of English's status as an international language to a profound influence on learners' motivations should have significant implications for language educators and the decisions they make in developing EFL curricula and defining EFL education policy that serves the needs and objectives of language learners.

The discussion surrounding English as an international language should garner a consensus among all conscientious EFL educators, that NNS English should be considered as valid as NS English, and that being identified as English-speaking should not require nativeness in its most narrow, NS-oriented forms. On the other hand, that learners can and do have aspirations that involve NS culture must not be minimized simply for the sake of reversing perceived threats to NNS language ownership. It is the responsibility of educators to create an environment where all varieties of English are acceptable and welcome in order to foster positive attitudes about language learning, but also to allow learners to aspire toward varieties of English that they may

ultimately prefer.

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